

A SOLDIER OF COMMERCE

BY JOHN ROE GORDON

Copyright, 1902, by F. R. Toombs

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MONASTERY OF THE LAMAS.

"SURELY," said Orskoff, peering in the darkness at the face of the American, "it is not your purpose to desert the girls."

"I should say not; but with our feet and hands tied and we helpless in that camp we could not assist them. It's this way: Domitan is now camping in the woods. His horses are on the cliff. According to what he said, there is a road farther up the pass by which he will take the camels to the mountains. If that rascal ever gets the girls into the Zannuck stronghold, nothing that we can do will avail. We've got to think of something to do now."

"But what? Is it to fight? I will fight to the last drop of blood!"

"No, fighting will not help us. We've got to win out by some trick."

"They sat down, and Orskoff leaned his head in his hands. Harvey became intent with his thoughts."

"Hello!" said Harvey, getting to his feet quickly. "Somebody around here? Hear that noise? Sounds like a wounded man calling for aid."

"Must be one of the Zannucks or one of the ameer's men who crawled here to get out of the way."

"I'm going to see who and what it is," said Harvey. "I can't see friend or enemy suffer when helpless."

"They soon discovered a man, wounded by spear and sword, lying near the side of the road."

"Are those friends?" he whispered in the tongue of the ameer's people.

"We have reason to be enemies, but we have no wish to harm you. Is there anything we can do?"

"Canst thou bring water?"

"I could if I knew where there was any," said Harvey. "Do you know of a river or spring near by?"

"Nay, there is none nearer than the Batoola temple."

"And what is this Batoola temple?"

"A place for lamas—priests of the monastery. There are many there. They are hospitable. If I could get there, they would know how to deal with my wounds."

"How far is it?"

"It is not far. It stands on the high-way, but is surrounded by high walls."

"How came you here?"

"I was with the ameer's men when we were attacked by the Zannucks. I was wounded and crawled away from the pass, for the Zannucks kill all their wounded enemies. I could go no farther."

"You came to a good place. The Zannucks are almost within reach of our voices. But tell me more about that Batoola temple."

"As I said, it is a lama monastery. There are monks of all kinds there—missionary monks, begging monks, praying monks."

"Are they all natives of Bokhara?"

"Not all. They come of many nations. Could I be carried there?" asked the wounded soldier.

"We have work to do here," broke in Orskoff. "We cannot give you the time."

"You spoke of begging monks," said Harvey. "What do they beg? How do they reach people?"

"They walk along the roads and ask alms of all they meet. It is in this way the monasteries are supported."

"What do they wear? What sort of looking?"

"You interested in monks?" interrupted Orskoff impatiently. "We have no time to think of them."

"I am thinking of them very hard just now."

Again addressing the wounded man, Harvey asked:

"What sort of garb do these monks wear?"

"Cloaks and hoods. They are humble and holy men."

"I've seen them near Lake Baikal in Siberia," said Orskoff. "They cover their heads and faces so their own grandmothers wouldn't recognize them."

"Oh, they do! And the monastery is poor, supported by alms?"

"Yes," said the soldier of the ameer. "You want to go there?"

"I would live if I could be carried there."

"If we could make a litter of some kind, we might do it."

"We could manage with our coats to make a chair in which to carry him," said Orskoff, "but we have not the time. We cannot forsake our duty to the girls for a wounded enemy."

"We are not forsaking the girls. I have an idea these monks can be of use to us. I want to see them. Help me make the chair."

Harvey's voice was imperative. Orskoff protested, but it was of no avail. He tied the sleeves of their coats together and formed what he called a Russian field chair. The wounded man was then picked up, and the three

COAL! COAL! COAL!

WE ARE EXCLUSIVE AGENTS FOR

The Genuine

"Niggerhead" Maitland Lump Coal

AND

Victor Lump Coal

And when we say we will give you the Genuine Maitland Coal WE MEAN IT, and will not substitute some other grade of coal. Don't be fooled in taking something that is claimed to be just as good, but come and get the Genuine Maitland and Victor Coal.

We also carry a large stock of Grain and Field Seeds of all kinds, also the genuine Piedmont Smithing Coal.

We pay the highest CASH Prices for Hides. Good Wagon Yards and courteous treatment to all.

COME AND SEE US WHEN IN TOWN.

GOBER, HUME & KENYON,

By W. C. KENYON, Manager.

started off.

"Tell me more about these monks," said Harvey as they went along.

"They are priests of the religion of Buddha-Sakyamuni. They are good and holy men."

"Have I not heard somewhere that they are supposed to be gifted with the power to foretell the future—a sort of second sight?"

"Yes, they have magic sight."

"Are the Zannucks believers in these monks?"

"Yes, all of them."

"How shall we know when we reach this monastery?"

"There is a light at the pool. If I can be bathed in the sacred pool of Batoola, I shall be cured."

"What pool is that?"

"The life giving pool of Batoola. It is just within the first gate. One who bathes in it is made holy and is given much power by the Dalai lama."

"Watch for the light. But the dawn is breaking; we shall soon be able to see for ourselves."

An hour later they saw the stone walls of the lama monastery.

"The first gate is there," said the Bokharan, who proved to be a young, handsome fellow and seemed inclined to be friendly.

"How do we call them?" asked Harvey as they reached the iron gate.

"There is a rope. Pull it, and a bell will ring."

Harvey pulled a rope that dangled from above, and inside a bell tolled twice. Immediately the wicket of the gate was opened.

"Who disturbs the peace of this holy city?" asked a voice.

The hooded face of a monk peered out at them.

"A wounded soldier of the ameer who seeks thy help," answered the young Bokharan.

"Enter."

The gate was opened, and the monk walked away, leaving the three at the edge of a large pool. Soon other monks in their peculiar garb, wearing hoods that hid their faces, came toward them, and the wounded soldier was laid up on a bed brought from the interior. Another wall could be seen, and inside of this was a large building.

"He shall be bathed in the pool by our brothers," said one of the priests. "The living waters of Batoola will surely heal his wounds."

The gatekeeper went to lock the gate.

"Nay, good father," said Harvey; "do not lock the gate. When we learn of the effect of the bathing on our friend, we will proceed upon our way."

An aged priest was coming toward them, followed by several others. The face of the old priest was kindly, and as he examined the wounded man Harvey watched him closely.

"He's my man," he said.

The old lama gave several orders, which his inferiors put into execution, and then turned away. Harvey interceded him.

"Holy one," he said as he walked by the old priest's side, "may one who knows but little of thy race and religion ask a boon?"

"All men may come to us and learn. It is not to learn, for there is not time. I wish to do that which perhaps is not according to your laws. Not far from here are wicked men, hundreds of them, who have stolen two young women and will perhaps harm them if we cannot rescue them. Two of us against so many are powerless, but we could do something by strategy if we wore the garb of your order. I have gold, and here here is a watch from faroff America, here is a diamond ring from Paris; these will I give to enrich thy temple for the use of two such outfits of clothing as thy people wear."

The old priest looked at him curiously.

"This request never has been made before. I do not understand. Wouldst thou seek to harm us by a wrongful act?"

"Is it wrongful to rescue young women from robbers?"

"Nay, but the robe of a holy man must not be soiled with blood."

"I promise that no stain of crime shall rest upon it. If blood there is, it shall be our own."

The gleaming diamond attracted the old priest. He listened to the ticking of the watch.

"They are wonderful and beautiful. And wouldst thou give both for the use of two of these girls?"

"Yes, gladly."

"Come with me."

Harvey motioned to Orskoff, who followed him.

"What are you after now?" he asked.

"You and I are to become monks—old and feeble monks."

Orskoff stared in amazement. His amazement grew as he saw Harvey hand over to the priest his expensive watch and valuable diamond ring in exchange for two outfits of the monkish garb.

"These garments are new and have not been consecrated to our purpose," said the lama. "Take them. Remember, thou shalt shed no blood."

"We promise, and we thank thee."

With the robes and hoods they went out of the place. Harvey started at a quick pace back toward the camp. At a convenient place he stopped and said:

"As soon as I heard of these monks it seemed to me that this was the solution of the problem. We can't fight 200 men. My idea is to disguise ourselves and appear as old and feeble as possible, traveling in the same direction as Domitan's forces. We will ask a lift as far as the Batoola monastery, and if the Zannucks are believers, as the Bokharan said, they will grant what we ask. The camels bearing the girls have the lightest burdens, and it ought not to be difficult to get



An aged priest was coming toward them, followed by several others.

"I swear by the holy crown of the great white czar," Orskoff exclaimed, "that you are the most daring and the most resourceful devil I ever knew! Did anything ever overcome you? The world is your plaything. You do what you will with all people. If I had asked that old priest for these things, he would have expelled me from the place."

"Well, you are a soldier. I've got to know how to talk or I couldn't sell windmills."

"Talk! You could convince a man that he was a horse. It takes no great amount of talk sometimes to convince him he is an ass. This is the most surprising result of your skill I have yet witnessed. Well, the thing is fascinating. We will try it."

The Russian wondered still more at the resources of the American during the process of disguising themselves. The people of the region were dark. With the brown hanks of nuts of a walnut tree he made an olive colored stain, which he daubed over their faces. With a pair of folding scissors he cut off the Russian's mustache, bringing sadness to his heart. They made themselves grimy with the soil of the road and practiced the walk of feeble old men. So well did Harvey execute this part that Orskoff said they would become play actors next.

"We are to permit ourselves to be overtaken by Domitan's army," said Harvey, "and ask to be assisted on

our way. Let me do the talking. And, what you see me do, do also. I must plan as I go along, for after we join the Zannucks there will be no time."

Slowly they tramped along the road, and at last, judging themselves to be about half way between the camp and the monastery, they waited.

"Here they come," said Harvey. "Be ready and keep cool. It will be the effort of our lives."

CHAPTER XXII.
A BACK FOR LIBERTY.

DOMITAN'S caravan came on slowly, for the men were walking. They had sent a portion of the force round another way to get the horses that had been left on the cliff.

Domitan and his captains rode ahead mounted on horses they had taken from the Bokharans. Following came the little army, straggling along in anything but military style, laughing, singing and celebrating their victory. It was Domitan's watchful eye that discovered two bowed and bent priests resting by the wayside, their great hoods concealing their faces except for the eyes.

"It is well," he said to one of his captains, "that on the first day of my chieftainship I meet with two holy men upon the way. I will give them alms and have their blessings upon me."

"Most holy fathers, holy ones of the sun, bless me," he said, "for I am but today the chief of the Zannucks."

"I bless you," said Harvey, with a weak and trembling voice as he pocketed the gold. "We are weary, and the temple is far. Hast thou not sent for us on a camel? I see there are two with apparently but little load."

"It is well that thy presence augurs good," said Domitan in a sort of exaltation. "These camels bear the one who will be my bride and the one who will be the bride of my brother. Surely it will be well for us if the holy men ride with them. Come."

He went back to the camels and commanded them to kneel.

"Holy companions wilt thou have, my sweet ones," he said. "These holy men have blessed me, and I have made them presents. I shall win great victories."

Harvey got into the howdah by the side of Alma, and Orskoff, with apparent feebleness, climbed in with Koura. The camels rose to their feet again, and Domitan proudly led on. It was not every day that a chieftain had two lamas in his caravan.

Orskoff was filthy. He knew that when they reached the monastery they would be expected to bury, but he had faith that Harvey would surmount the difficulty. He saw Harvey scanning the sky and mumbling and making peculiar signs. Harvey called to Domitan, and the chief rode back.

"I see mysterious signs in the heavens," said Harvey in a manner that would inspire awe. "I see but an hour's ride from this spot a band of soldiers of the ameer coming to give you battle. They are mighty men and armed. I have blessed thee, and therefore thou wilt surely win. But these tender children must not be taken into danger if thou wouldst have them for wives. Take thy fighting men and go meet the foe. We will remain here, where it is safe."

"How many of the ameer's soldiers dost thou see, holy one?"

"Ten score of horse."

"We are their equals. We will obey thee, holy one, leaving only enough to guard thee."

He appointed an officer and part of a company to remain to guard and led the remainder on to meet the foe. The caravan came to a halt. The camels laden with merchandise were brought up, and the soldiers put aside their arms to make camp.

"Now, you gallant Russian!" shouted Harvey as he turned his camel and gave it a prick with the blade of his knife. The beast flew like the very wind toward Sileon, with Koura's camel in hot pursuit.

Cries of rage and consternation rose from the soldiers. A few shots were fired, but no bullet touched them. On, on, they went. Nothing stayed the mad flight. The howdahs rocked and swayed and the girls became dizzy. Harvey goaded his camel to the utmost. He could picture to himself a soldier on the best horse sent to inform Domitan; one chief's wild ride back in pursuit; his awful rage when he knew he had been duped; his murderous desire for revenge. Harvey gritted his teeth and sped the camel on. Many a long journey had he taken on the beasts and knew well the handling of them.

Thus they raced on the fleetest camels in all Bokhara. For ten hours they kept up the pace. Then he knew it would be safe to rest, for the best horse Domitan possessed could not overtake them.

Then on again for hours they sped along the pass; then another stop for water and fruit. They passed a shepherd's cottage, and he gave them a good meal.

"That's enough," said Harvey. "That will do till we reach Sileon. There's plenty on the gunboat."

On again they went, slackening the pace but little. They reached Sileon in two days. The caravan was four days in making the distance.

Sileon was agape with astonishment when it saw the camels of the ameer racing into the place with the two pretty women and two monks. It was eager to know the particulars. The streets were filled with Russian sailors, and Russian guns frowned from a gunboat in the harbor.

Harvey and Orskoff alighted, while the Russians and people of Sileon gathered round.

"Where is Lieutenant Nevsky?" asked Orskoff, removing his red hat and robe and showing himself in his regular uniform.

"Lieutenant Nevsky has been sent back to Sakain," was the reply of a sailor. "Admiral Platoff is here with the gunboat, yonder, waiting for you."

"Does he understand?"

"I suppose so. We knew you were coming here."

"Signal the gunboat!"

While the boat was coming Harvey arranged with a bazaar merchant to have the camels returned to the ameer, who, he said, would give a reward for their recovery.

The gunboat showed signs of activity, and the small boat soon took them to it. On the deck stood a grizzled old officer wearing the uniform of an admiral. He did not greet them, but looked with some curiosity at a girl in the uniform of the inspector of prisons, a grimy American clad as a lama, a naval officer with a monk's hood in his hand and Koura, the girl who had twice been stolen from Tiflis.

"I inform you that you are my prisoners!" he said curtly.

"You place us under arrest!" exclaimed Orskoff.

"I do. You for deserting your gunboat and entering forbidden territory and releasing captured robbers, the American as being an escaped prisoner, Alma Juradoff for releasing said prisoner. Koura Barttelkis is not under arrest. You shall go at once to Tiflis for trial."

In the office of the governor's palace at Tiflis sat a man of powerful build wearing a uniform that betokened exalted rank. He was General Urloff, governor general of the province, a man of blood and iron and one in whom the czar placed so much confidence that it was said that a command from Urloff was a command from the czar himself.

Before him stood three prisoners. He listened attentively while they told the story of their adventures. It is not necessary to repeat the testimony that was given before the governor general. In the main it was Harvey Irons' cool voice that rehearsed the adventures that culminated in the arrests by Admiral Platoff.

When the story was ended, General Urloff said:

"With his knowledge of the matter, having been told by Lieutenant Nevsky

[Continued on 4th page.]